

### **III. CORRIDOR ASSESSMENT**

**Historic Context**

**Market Economics**

**Land Use and Zoning**

**Housing**

**Transportation**

**Urban Design and Public Realm**

### III. Corridor Assessment

## HISTORIC CONTEXT

Georgia Avenue has historically played a significant role in the development and growth of the city and has derived its identity from the types of uses that found an address along the corridor. The Georgia Avenue corridor has been the center of residential and commercial activity and an integral part of the surrounding neighborhoods since development of the new federal city began expanding towards Maryland in the late 1800s.

The transportation system of the city greatly influenced the direction of residential and commercial development along the corridor. In the 1800s, several streetcar lines were extended from the city's center. One was the Seventh Street route that terminated at Rock Creek Church Road. A turnpike, built in 1819, ran along the avenue from the old city boundary (Florida Avenue) to the District line (Eastern Avenue). By 1912, trolley

service extended north on the Seventh Street line to Silver Spring, Maryland. In the 1930s, buses were introduced and eventually replaced the trolley car. These early transportation routes shaped shopping patterns and created the commercial frontage on the corridor.

In the 1850s, most of the development in the city was still south of S Street. Howard University was established in 1867 from extensive federal land extending further north to the Old Soldiers Home. LeDroit Park was developed in the 1870s on land acquired from the University. The areas north of Howard University to the Maryland boundary grew slowly until the early 1800s when several race-tracks were built. They became a major social and recreational activity and drew large crowds.

By 1902, development boomed, former estates were subdivided and the pattern of row house development was established in most of the area. From 1890 to the mid 1900s, Brightwood (including all the territory from Silver Spring to Rock Creek Church Road) was subdivided in to Brightwood, Manor, Takoma, and Shepherd Park. The U.S. Soldiers and Airmen's Home, built in 1909, and the Walter Reed Army Medical Center, established in 1922, stimulated homeownership and neighborhood commercial development and shaped the area's landscape.

By the early to mid 1900s, Georgia Avenue was recognized as one of the most successful, prestigious mixed-use commercial corridors in the city. It served the residential, recreational and social needs of a rich, vibrant and culturally diverse community. However, integration laws in the

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1960s caused out migration to the suburbs and the population shifted from majority white to majority black. Also during this period, the corridor began to lose its vitality as a center of commerce due to suburban growth and increased automobile use, which provided and continue to produce strong competition to the retail stores along Georgia Avenue.

Many events have led to the current condition of Georgia Avenue over the last thirty plus years, ranging from civil unrest in the late 1960s to suburban flight over the next two decades. Additionally, retailing has changed forever. Big-box stores, malls, outlets, power centers, catalogs, the Internet, and lifestyle changes have changed how and where today's consumers shop. Since the 1990s, Georgia Avenue is typical of an inner-city area going through transition.